# Philological Feasibility Study: A Lexical and Grammatical Analysis of Matthew 25:46

## 1. Prolegomena: The Linguistic Scope of the Inquiry

The translation of ancient texts is never a purely mechanical conversion of codes; it is an interpretive act governed by the constraints of morphology, syntax, and semantic range. The query presented posits a specific English rendering of Matthew 25:46: *"And these shall depart towards the punishment pertaining to the age: but the righteous towards the life pertaining to the age."* This proposed translation diverges significantly from the established ecclesiastical tradition, which typically renders the verse as, "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."

The divergence is not merely stylistic but strikes at the very ontological definitions of the nouns and adjectives involved. The task of this report is to evaluate the proposed translation strictly within the bounds of philological possibility. By stripping away theological consensus, doctrinal presuppositions, and dogmatic tradition, we are left with the raw data of the Koine Greek language: the etymological roots, the grammatical cases, the prepositional vectors, and the syntactical relationships.

To achieve a comprehensive answer, this investigation requires an exhaustive deconstruction of four primary linguistic components found in the Greek text *καὶ ἀπελεύσονται οὗτοι εἰς κόλασιν αἰώνιον, οἱ δὲ δίκαιοι εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον*:

1. **The Directional Vector:** The use of the preposition *eis* (εἰς) and whether "towards" is a permissible translation of its spatial and telic function.
2. **The Substantive of Discipline:** The semantic range of *kolasin* (κόλασιν) and whether "punishment" (specifically with a corrective nuance) is the inherent lexical value, distinct from retributive vengeance.
3. **The Adjectival Morphology:** The derivation of *aionios* (αἰώνιον) via the suffix *-ios*, and whether "pertaining to the age" is a more linguistically accurate gloss than "eternal."
4. **The Syntactical Definiteness:** The justification for inserting the definite article "the" ("the punishment," "the life") despite the anarthrous (no article) construction in the Greek source.

The methodology employed herein is rigorous lexical semantic analysis, utilizing data from the Septuagint (LXX), Classical Greek literature, and New Testament usage to map the "semantic domain" of each term. If the proposed translation falls within the permissible semantic range of the Greek vocabulary and adheres to the rules of Greek syntax, it must be deemed

philologically valid, regardless of its theological novelty.

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# 2. The Vector of Departure: Analyzing *Eis* (εἰς) and Motion

The first pivotal shift in the proposed translation is the rendering of the preposition *eis* as "towards" rather than the static or enclosing "into." In the traditional rendering ("into everlasting punishment"), the preposition functions to locate the subject *within* a state of being. The proposed rendering ("towards the punishment") suggests a trajectory, an orientation, or a teleological movement. To validate this, we must examine the spatial and metaphorical mechanics of *eis* in Koine Greek.

## 2.1 The Spatial Semantics of *Eis*

The preposition *eis* is one of the most versatile and frequent prepositions in the New Testament corpus, appearing over 1,700 times.[1] Its primary root meaning denotes motion *into* a place, contrasting with *en* (in/within) and *ek* (out of). However, lexical authorities have long recognized that *eis* is not limited to the finality of entrance but often emphasizes the *extension* toward a goal.

According to the *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains* (Louw-Nida), *eis* functions as a marker of extension toward a special goal, which allows for translations such as "to," "toward," or "in the direction of".[2] This definition is critical. It establishes that the linguistic focus of *eis* is not necessarily the *containment* of the object within the goal, but the *orientation* of the subject toward that goal.

Bill Mounce's morphological analysis supports this, defining *eis* spatially as "movement toward or into an area".[3] The inclusion of "toward" as a primary definition confirms that the preposition governs the trajectory. In the context of Matthew 25:46, the verb *apeleusontai* (they will depart) is a verb of motion. When a verb of motion is coupled with *eis*, the construction highlights the destination. However, the nuance of *eis* allows the speaker to emphasize the *direction* of the departure.

Consider the usage in Matthew 2:14, where Joseph takes the child and flees *eis* Egypt.[3] While the narrative implies they eventually entered Egypt, the grammatical force of the command is directional: "Flee *towards* Egypt." Similarly, in abstract contexts, *eis* often delineates the "end towards which" an action is directed.[4] If the "punishment" (*kolasin*) is viewed as a process rather than a static location (a distinct possibility discussed in Section 3), then "towards" becomes a highly precise rendering, indicating movement into a process of correction.

## 2.2 The Phenomenon of *Constructio Praegnans*

A sophisticated grammatical feature relevant to this inquiry is *constructio praegnans* (pregnant construction). This occurs when a preposition of motion is used with a verb that does not strictly imply motion, or conversely, when the combination implies a complexity of movement and result.

In Classical and Koine Greek, the boundary between "to," "into," and "towards" is fluid. The preposition *pros* is the typical word for "towards," yet *eis* frequently overlaps with this semantic domain. Lexicographers note that *eis* can denote "direction toward a goal" without necessarily focusing on the interiority of the goal.[4]

The proposed translation ("depart towards") leverages this overlap. By using "towards," the translator emphasizes the *orientation* of the judgment. The "goats" are not merely teleported into a container called "punishment"; they are sent away on a trajectory that leads to *kolasin*. This aligns with the "telic" (purpose-driven) use of *eis*.

### 2.3 The Telic Force: *Eis* as Purpose

Beyond spatial motion, *eis* is the primary preposition used to indicate purpose ("with a view to" or "for the purpose of").[4] A famous example is Acts 2:38, where baptism is *eis* the remission of sins. The debate there centers on whether *eis* means "because of" (retrospective) or "for the purpose of" (prospective). The consensus among Greek grammarians (e.g., Daniel Wallace, A.T. Robertson) is that *eis* is almost always prospective.[5] It looks forward to a result.

Applying this to Matthew 25:46, if *eis* carries a telic force, the phrase could be understood as "departing *with a view to* punishment/correction." The English preposition "towards" captures this prospective nuance better than "into," which sounds purely locative. "Towards" implies that the punishment is the *goal* or the *intended outcome* of the departure.

Therefore, the rendering "towards" is not only allowable but philologically robust. It respects the prospective, goal-oriented nature of *eis* (as documented by Balz and Schneider), distinguishing it from a static location.[5] It frames the "punishment" and the "life" not just as bins to be dropped into, but as the destiny toward which the subjects are oriented.

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## 3. The Substantive of Correction: *Kolasin* (κόλασιν)

The second component of the translation is the noun *kolasin* (accusative singular of *kolasis*). The user's proposed translation renders this as "the punishment." While this seems standard, the linguistic permissibility of the entire phrase ("punishment pertaining to the age") depends heavily on the internal semantics of *kolasin*. Does this word allow for a "punishment" that is compatible with an "age" (a limited duration)? The answer lies in its etymology and historical

usage.

## 3.1 Etymology: The Agricultural Metaphor

The word *kolasis* is derived from the verb *kolazo* (κολάζω). The etymological root of *kolazo* is *kolos* (κόλος), which means "docked," "lopped," or "clipped".[7] In its earliest usage, the term was distinctly agricultural. It referred to the pruning of trees—specifically, checking the growth of foliage to encourage fruitfulness.

Theophrastus (c. 371–287 BC), the successor to Aristotle and a botanist, utilized *kolazo* to describe the "checking" or "punishing" of almond trees to prevent them from becoming too leafy and unfruitful.[7] This "punishment" inflicted on the tree was not for the purpose of destroying the tree, but for its betterment. The violence of the pruning was instrumental; the goal was restoration and productivity.

This metaphor transferred into the realm of human sociology and jurisprudence. To *kolazo* a person was to "prune" their behavior—to correct them. Thus, *kolasis* fundamentally carries the semantic DNA of "correction," "chastisement," or "remedial discipline".[9] It is distinct from destruction.

## 3.2 The Aristotelian Distinction: *Kolasis* vs. *Timoria*

The most critical piece of lexical evidence regarding *kolasis* is the distinction drawn by Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* (1.10.17). Aristotle explicitly contrasts *kolasis* with another Greek word for punishment, *timoria* (τιμωρία).

> "*Kolasis* is for the sake of the one who suffers it, while *timoria* is for the sake of the one who inflicts it, that he may be satisfied." [8]

This definition is paramount. Aristotle categorizes *kolasis* as disciplinary action intended to improve the offender. It is patient-centered. *Timoria*, conversely, is vindictive action intended to satisfy the anger or justice of the punisher. It is agent-centered.

This distinction was not limited to Aristotle. Plato, in *Protagoras* (324a), argues that no rational person punishes (*kolazei*) for the sake of the past wrong (retribution), but for the sake of the future, that the offender might not do wrong again.[8] For Plato and the classical tradition, *kolasis* is inherently educational and remedial.

## 3.3 *Kolasis* in the Septuagint and Hellenistic Usage

The Septuagint (LXX) usage of *kolasis* (appearing approx. 15 times) broadens the term. In texts like Ezekiel 14:3 or 18:30, it translates concepts of "stumbling block" or divine retribution.[11] While some scholars argue that the LXX usage dilutes the Aristotelian distinction, blending it with general retribution, the core idea of "checking" or "restraining" remains

visible.

However, in the New Testament, *kolasis* appears only in Matthew 25:46 and 1 John 4:18 ("fear has *kolasin*"). In 1 John, the context suggests "torment" or "penal infliction," yet even there, it can be viewed as a "pruning" or "restraint" that hinders the perfection of love. The scarcity of the word in the NT forces us to rely on the broader Hellenistic context, where the distinction of "corrective punishment" was well-known.

### 3.4 Compatibility with the Proposed Translation

The user's translation renders *kolasin* simply as "punishment." This is the standard, safe lexical gloss found in almost all dictionaries. However, understanding the *nature* of this punishment is crucial for the feasibility of the adjective *aionios* ("pertaining to the age").

If *kolasis* inherently implies correction (pruning), then it implies a process with a beginning and an end. A pruning that never ceases is not pruning; it is destruction. A correction that never succeeds is not correction; it is endless torture. Therefore, the noun *kolasis* creates a semantic expectation of limited duration or specific purpose. This harmonizes perfectly with the translation "punishment pertaining to the age"—i.e., the specific, corrective discipline appropriate to the coming age, rather than an endless state of retributive violence.

The translation "punishment" is allowable, but the philological substrate suggests that "chastisement" or "correction" might be even more precise. Nevertheless, strictly answering the user's prompt: Yes, "punishment" is allowable, and when paired with the etymological background, it supports the non-eternal reading of the adjective that follows.

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## 4. The Adjectival Morphology: *Aionios* (αἰώνιον)

We now arrive at the crux of the translation: the rendering of *aionios* as "pertaining to the age" rather than "eternal." This is the most contested point doctrinally, but philologically, the case for "pertaining to the age" is robust, relying on morphological rules of derivation and the semantic range of the root noun *aion*.

### 4.1 The Morphology of the Suffix *-ios* (-ιος)

To determine the meaning of *aionios*, we must analyze its construction. It is a compound of the noun *aion* (αἰών) and the adjectival suffix *-ios*.

In Ancient and Koine Greek, the suffix *-ios* (and its variants *-ikos*, *-inos*) is a standard mechanism for converting a noun into an adjective that denotes "belonging to," "pertaining to," "possessing the qualities of," or "related to" the root noun.[12]

Consider the following morphological parallels:

- **Noun:** *Ouranos* (Heaven) $\rightarrow$ **Adjective:** *Ouran-ios* (Pertaining to heaven / Heavenly).
- **Noun:** *Potamos* (River) $\rightarrow$ **Adjective:** *Potam-ios* (Pertaining to the river / Riverine).
- **Noun:** *Agros* (Field) $\rightarrow$ **Adjective:** *Agr-ios* (Pertaining to the field / Wild).
- **Noun:** *Aion* (Age) $\rightarrow$ **Adjective:** *Aion-ios* (Pertaining to the age).

A fundamental rule of etymology is that an adjective cannot inherently possess a force greater than the noun from which it is derived.[14] If the noun *agros* means "field," the adjective *agrios* cannot mean "endless field." It simply relates the modified noun to the concept of a field. Similarly, if the noun *aion* means "age" (a period of time), the adjective *aionios* cannot, by simple morphological derivation, mean "endless." It must mean "related to the age."

## 4.2 The Semantic Domain of *Aion* (αἰών)

If *aionios* means "pertaining to the *aion*," we must define *aion*.

1. **Homeric/Classical Usage:** *Aion* originally referred to the "life force," "spinal marrow," or simply a "lifespan".[15] It was a finite period associated with vitality.
2. **Platonic Usage:** Plato appropriated *aion* to distinguish the timeless, unchanging world of Forms from the moving, changing world of *chronos* (time). For Plato, *aion* was qualitative—it referred to a *mode* of existence distinct from linear time.[15]
3. **Hebraic/LXX Usage:** The Septuagint translators chose *aion* to translate the Hebrew word *olam*. This is critical for New Testament exegesis. *Olam* comes from a root meaning "to hide" or "to conceal".[17] It refers to time that is hidden from view—the "vanishing point" on the horizon. It can refer to the distant past ("days of old"), a lifetime ("slave forever" - Ex 21:6), or the indefinite future.

Importantly, neither *aion* nor *olam* contains the inherent mathematical concept of "infinity." They represent indefinite duration or specific epochs. The Jews divided time into "This Age" (*Ha Olam Ha Zeh*) and "The Age to Come" (*Ha Olam Ha Ba*).

## 4.3 The Philological Validity of "Pertaining to the Age"

Given this background, the translation "pertaining to the age" is a hyper-literal rendering of the morphology. It treats *aionios* as a relational adjective.

- **Evidence from Jude 7:** Sodom and Gomorrah suffered the "vengeance of eternal fire" (*puros aioniou*). Lexically, if *aionios* means "endless," the fire must still be burning. It is not. However, if *aionios* means "fire pertaining to the Age" (i.e., the fire of that specific divine judgment), the contradiction vanishes. The fire was the fire *of the Age*, qualitative in its divine source and destructive power.[19]
- **Evidence from Titus 1:2:** Paul speaks of the hope promised "before times eternal" (*pro chronōn aioniōn*). Translating this as "before endless times" is logically difficult (how can you be before endlessness?). Translating it as "before age-during times" or "before the

times of the ages" (secular times) makes perfect sense.[20]

The user's proposed translation "pertaining to the age" aligns with the scholarship of Marvin Vincent, who wrote, "*Aionios*... means enduring through or pertaining to a period of time".[17] It also aligns with the translation philosophy of David Bentley Hart, who renders Matthew 25:46 as "the chastening of that Age" and "the life of that Age".[21]

Therefore, "pertaining to the age" is not only allowable; it is morphologically superior to "eternal" because it preserves the root connection to *aion* without importing the Latinized concept of *aeternitas* (timelessness) which was foreign to the Hebraic usage of *olam*.

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# 5. The Syntax of Definiteness: The Anarthrous Construction

The proposed translation reads: "towards the punishment... towards the life."
However, a scrutiny of the Greek text reveals that the definitive article (tēn) is missing before both nouns:

- *eis kolasin aionion* (not *eis* ***tēn*** *kolasin...*)
- *eis zoēn aionion* (not *eis* ***tēn*** *zoēn...*)

Is the translator permitted to insert "the" (marking definiteness) where the Greek has no article?

## 5.1 Definiteness in Anarthrous Nouns

In English, the absence of an article ("towards punishment") usually implies indefiniteness ("a punishment" or generic punishment). In Koine Greek, this is not the case. Nouns can be definite without the article ("anarthrous") based on several syntactical rules.

1. **Apollonius' Canon:** This rule generally applies to genitive constructions, but it reflects a broader principle: nouns in prepositional phrases frequently omit the article while retaining definiteness. A common example is *en oikō* ("in house"), which is translated "in the house" or "at home." The preposition *eis* serves as a sufficient marker of the relationship, allowing the article to be dropped for economy.[22]
2. **Qualitative Emphasis:** Anarthrous nouns often emphasize the *quality* or *nature* of the thing rather than its identity. By omitting the article, Matthew may be highlighting the *kind* of punishment (an *aionios* kind) rather than pointing to a specific instance. However, in English, to convey the weight of this specific eschatological reality, "The Punishment" is often the best equivalent.
3. **Monadic Nouns:** Nouns that represent unique concepts (like "The Sun," "God," "The Judgment") often drop the article because they are monadic—there is only one of them in the context. In the context of the Sheep and Goats judgment, there is only one "Life"

and one "Punishment" being dispensed. They are definitive by their singularity in the eschatological drama.

### 5.2 Justifying "The" in the User's Translation

The translation "towards **the** punishment pertaining to the age" supplies the article to convey the specificity of the Jewish concept. "The Age" (*Ha Olam*) was a specific, definite concept in Second Temple Judaism. If *aionios* modifies *kolasin* to mean "Punishment of the Age," it effectively makes the noun definite.

Just as we might say "Solar Energy" (Energy of **the** Sun) without an article before "Solar," the phrase *kolasin aionion* functions as a technical term: "Age-Correction." Translating it as "**the** punishment pertaining to the age" is a legitimate way to represent the definiteness inherent in the concept of the Messianic Age.

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## 6. The Principle of Parallelism

Syntactically, Matthew 25:46 exhibits strict parallelism.

- Clause A: ...*eis kolasin aionion*
- Clause B: ...*eis zōēn aionion*

The adjective *aionios* is used for both the punishment of the wicked and the life of the righteous. A common theological argument against the "age-during" translation is that if the punishment is temporary (an age), then the life must also be temporary (an age), thus denying eternal life.[9]

However, from a purely *linguistic* standpoint, the user's translation handles this perfectly by treating the adjective identically in both clauses:

- "towards the punishment **pertaining to the age**"
- "towards the life **pertaining to the age**"

This translation is symmetrical and intellectually honest. It asserts that both the punishment and the life belong to the Coming Age. It does *not* make a claim about the *duration* of that Age. If the Age to Come is endless (as implied elsewhere in Scripture), then the Life of that Age is endless. If the Punishment is "of the Age," it occurs within that Age.

Linguistically, "pertaining to the age" is a safe container. It does not force the word *aionios* to carry the weight of "endlessness" on its own shoulders; it passes that responsibility to the theology of the *Aion*. Thus, the translation is grammatically rigorous.

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# 7. Historical Precedents and Comparative Analysis

To confirm that this translation is not an idiosyncratic anomaly, we can look to the history of literalist translation.

- **Young's Literal Translation (1862):** "And these shall go away to punishment **age-during**, but the righteous to life **age-during**." [19]
  - Young recognized *aionios* as a temporal adjective derived from *aion*.
- **Rotherham's Emphasized Bible (1902):** "And these shall go away into **age-abiding** correction, but the righteous into **age-abiding** life." [24]
  - Rotherham uses "correction" for *kolasin*, acknowledging the Aristotelian distinction.
- **Concordant Literal Version:** "And these shall be coming away into chastening **eonian**, yet the just into life **eonian**." [19]
  - This version transliterates the adjective to avoid the bias of "eternal."
- **David Bentley Hart (2017):** "And these will go to the chastening **of that Age**, but the just to the life **of that Age**." [21]
  - Hart, an Eastern Orthodox scholar, argues that *aionios* in this context refers to the specific eschatological Age (*Olam Ha Ba*). His translation is nearly identical in meaning to the user's proposal.

These precedents demonstrate that the proposed translation aligns with a minority but scholarly tradition that prioritizes etymological precision over theological convention.

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# 8. Integrated Analysis of Data Tables

To synthesize the lexical data, we present the following morphological breakdown supporting the feasibility of the user's translation.

### Table 1: Lexical Mapping of *Eis Kolasin Aionion*

| Greek Element | Traditional Gloss | Proposed Gloss | Philological Basis for Proposal | Source Support |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Eis** (εἰς) | Into | **Towards** | Spatial *extension toward a goal*; Telic force (purpose); *Constructio* | BDAG; Mounce [2] |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | *praegnans*. | |
| **Kolasin** (κόλασιν) | Punishment | **The Punishment** | *Kolazo* root (pruning/correction); Aristotelian distinction from *timoria* (retribution). Definite article supplied by context (monadic). | Aristotle; Theophrastus [7] |
| **Aionion** (αἰώνιον) | Eternal | **Pertaining to the age** | Morphological derivation (*aion* + *-ios*); Hebraic concept of *Olam* (hidden time/age); Jude 7 usage. | Vincent; Ramelli [12] |

## Table 2: The Adjectival Suffix *-ios* Mechanism

| Noun Root | Meaning | Adjective (-ios) | Meaning | Parallel to Aionios |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Ouranos* | Heaven | *Ouran-ios* | Pertaining to Heaven | Yes |
| *Agros* | Field | *Agr-ios* | Pertaining to the Field | Yes |
| *Aion* | Age | *Aion-ios* | Pertaining to the Age | **Yes** |
| *Chronos* | Time | *Chron-ios* | Pertaining to Time / Lingering | Yes |

Table 2 illustrates that *aionios* follows a standard pattern of Greek derivation. Just as *agrios* does not mean "endless field," *aionios* need not mean "endless age." It denotes relationship.

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# 9. Conclusion: The Verdict on Permissibility

The query asks whether Greek grammar and vocabulary *allow* for the translation: *"And these shall depart towards the punishment pertaining to the age: but the righteous towards the life pertaining to the age."*

Based on the exhaustive philological evidence presented above, the answer is **affirmative**.

1. **Grammar (Syntax):** The translation respects the directional capacity of the preposition *eis* ("towards") and appropriately handles the anarthrous construction by supplying the definite article ("the") based on the specific eschatological context.
2. **Vocabulary (Lexicography):**
    - **"Depart towards"** accurately reflects the future middle of *aperchomai* + the telic/directional *eis*.
    - **"Punishment"** is a permissible (even conservative) rendering of *kolasin*, though "correction" would also be valid.
    - **"Pertaining to the age"** is a highly accurate, etymologically transparent rendering of *aionios*, superior in morphological strictness to "eternal."
3. **Coherence:** The translation preserves the strict parallelism of the Greek text without importing the theological baggage of "endless duration" that is not inherent in the root words.

Therefore, the proposed translation is not only **allowable** but represents a **rigorous, high-fidelity mapping** of the Greek morphological structure into English. It exposes the Hebraic/Messianic conceptual framework ("The Age") underlying the Greek text, which is often obscured by the Latinized tradition of "eternal punishment."

The text stands as a valid, scholarly, and philologically sound representation of Matthew 25:46.

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